

VZCZCXRO5676  
RR RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHJS #0065/01 1500906  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 290906Z MAY 08  
FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0221  
INFO RUEHJS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0116  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0207  
RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0226  
RUEHC/USAID WASHDC  
RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0114

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SURABAYA 000065

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL, INR/EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV KISL KIRF PTER PINS ASEC ID](#)

SUBJECT: MALUKU: ETHNICITY, RELIGION MIGHT TRIGGER POST-ELECTION  
UNREST

REF: SURABAYA 60

SURABAYA 00000065 001.2 OF 002

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect  
accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: While Maluku remains calm, recent fighting between a handful of villages has underscored the role of ethnicity in all aspects of life in Maluku, ConGen Surabaya Pol-Econ Officer and Pol-Econ Assistant found during meetings with NGOs, media and political parties in Ambon, Maluku on May 19 and 20. Observers told us that the July 9 race for governor will be close and candidates will be increasingly tempted to push sectarian and ethnic buttons in an effort to win. Flawed voter rolls and irregularities could be initial triggers to post-election instability. End Summary

Not Only Religious Ties that Bind  
-----

¶2. (SBU) Native place ethnicity in the Maluku context matters as much as religious faith according to many we spoke with during a May 19-20 visit to the provincial capital Ambon. Villages remain bound by ties of "bela gandung" implying familial and linguistic bonds. During the period of armed conflict between Christian and Muslim communities, combatants often spared the lives of people of the same ethnic group but different religion. These bonds remain strong despite efforts of Muslim hardliners from Java. Hardliners reportedly insist that allegiance to non-Muslim fellow villagers in accordance with tradition is un-Islamic and forbidden. These "bela gandung" ties helped check violence, and yet conflict based on the same set of ties does occur (reftel). Whether these historic ties will continue to moderate potential Christian and Muslim polarization in the coming decades is an open question. Representatives from the Islamic Crescent Star Party (PBB) told us that Maluku voters voted their ethnicity and downplayed the role of religion. The Islamic Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) was also circumspect about ethnicity and religion during our discussion. They stressed the ecumenical nature of their strategy in Maluku and elsewhere.

Governor's Race: Christian v. Muslim  
-----

¶3. (SBU) While ethnicity and religion don't always coincide in Maluku, political races here are still oriented along religious

lines. The Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P) and PKS are considered Christian and Muslim parties, respectively. Red, the color of PDI-P, was also the color of the Christian militia during the conflict; likewise white was the color of Islamic fighters and the color of PKS. To journalist Ms. Febrianti Imelda Kaihatu of the Ambon-based daily, Suara Maluku, the Christian Muslim match-up looks a little too much like a replay of Maluku's conflict years. Members of Maluku PDI-P are overwhelmingly Christian (most are in Ambon), while PKS finds its base in the Muslim community, nearly 60% of Maluku's population. Recent broadcast text messages to cell phone subscribers in Maluku encouraged Muslim solidarity with the PKS candidate, Abdullah Tuasikal. Both front-runners have religiously "balanced" tickets common in parts of Indonesia with significant Christian populations. The Vice Governor candidate, Said Assagaf is Muslim and his PKS- supported challenger, Septinus Hematang is Christian. However, it is the winning governor's religion and the core identity of his party support that really matters, according to our sources.

14. (SBU) Several sources told us that the incumbent Christian, Karel Albert Ralahalu, is the frontrunner in the upcoming governor's election. Ralahalu is supported by Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P) and known as a leader close to the people, often traveling to remote West Maluku Tenggara to see what is on residents' minds. Ralahalu's government has doled out food assistance and shelter to victims in the recent violent clash between Saleman (Muslim) and Horale (Christian) villages (reftel). The speed and largesse of the assistance is due to the upcoming election, according to Febrianti and other sources in Maluku.

15. (SBU) Strongest among the Muslim candidates is the PKS candidate, Abdullah Tuasikal, according to Febrianti and Christian and Muslim members of Maluku Interfaith Institution (LAIM). Known as a tough campaigner, Tuasikal is currently in his second term as Bupati of Central Maluku. Alleged

SURABAYA 00000065 002.2 OF 002

involvement by the incumbent in corruption could help PKS. Given the current trend towards a religiously polarized race, a close victory could spark calls for a recount and even a new election. LAIM members speculated that a victory by PKS will encourage Muslim voters to accept a greater role for Islam in politics.

Voter Rolls -- Another Flash Point

16. (SBU) Voter roll irregularities could also be a flashpoint for conflict. The number of registered voters in the Central Maluku Regency for the upcoming governor's election is significantly smaller than the number registered for Central Maluku's Regency election in 2007. Voter rolls should be nearly identical in both contests. Central Maluku only just completed its election and the results have been verified by the election commission. Febrianti was incredulous about why there has been no uproar or even mention of this among local politicians. She speculated that the issue might be kept in reserve in the event dirt is needed to tarnish PKS's Tuasikal.

MCCLELLAND